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The 1999 Revision of the *Rite of Exorcism*: Part I

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The Second Vatican Council authorized the revision of all liturgical books, but, like the revision of the *Ordo Missae*, it is hard to believe that the bishops of the world envisioned the butchering of such an important ritual to the Church Militant as was inflicted upon the 1614 Exorcism Ritual, known as the *De exorcizandis obsessis a daemonio* in the *Rituale Romanum*. The 1999 revision of said ritual is called *De exorcismis et supplicationibus quibusdam*. Even the change in titles signals the change in focus of the two rituals: the 1614 ritual is about freeing those obsessed by demons. The 1999 revision is about prayers and supplications. I am sure the devil is happy to have the focus diverted from his actual wickedness to pious prayers about how bad he is.

I do not say this for effect. I say it because it is true. It appears as if someone actually took a knife to the ritual and then, when all the pieces were cut up and lying in a pile, discarded some and cobbled the rest back together calling this a "revision" of a sacred ritual. I have to say that comparing the 1614 exorcism ritual with the 1999 revision was a truly painful exercise which required deep prayer and reflection on my part as I went through it. It is no surprise to me, as Fr. Gabriele Amorth noted in his 1999 book *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, that the revision was conducted without the input of a single experienced and practicing exorcist. It certainly looks that way.

A word of caution first

It is important to mention something fundamental to the discussion of any liturgical document officially promulgated by the Church. That is, it is the Church's text, and as bad as it may be, it still has spiritual power. Our faith is in the Church that Christ founded, and despite the foibles (and bad revisions) of men, He remains true to His bride to whom He has entrusted the mission of salvation of souls. The official acts of the Church, objectively speaking, exercise a spiritual power that no individual has. Not only that but Christ gave this Church the authority to "bind and loose" (Mt 16:19) which is a spiritual power that takes many forms, liturgical documents being one of them. Hence, in some mysterious way Christ can even work through the incompetent decisions of His Church leaders and watered-down religious texts to bring men to salvation.

The other aspect of the Church's ritual books is that the "official" language is Latin. The simple fact that the exorcism prayer is in Latin—even this inelegant Latin—it can be a forceful missile launched against the devil. Latin as a sacred liturgical language is odious to the demon. It reminds him that there is a human-divine institution established by Christ for his destruction, and he is never happy when it comes against him in the highly un-diplomatic language of heaven. To me it is proof positive that the Church has the Holy Spirit at the very core of her mystical heart: bad Latin, bad translations and liturgical malfeasance still produced a text that the devil hates. How much more effective are we against the devil when we use the magnificent beauty of the Church's ancient rites un-"revised." Nonetheless, the spiritual power is there, even in this text.

Before I analyze the new ritual I think it wise to go over the salient points of the old ritual (which is still in force) in order to show the contrast.

A magnificent prayer feared by the devil
As I pored through the much lengthier 1614 Latin ritual I was stunned by the depth of theological profundity contained in the language and images the Church so carefully programmed into this spiritual warfare prayer. Some of the individual prayers of this ritual date back to the time of Alcuin in the 9th century[1] and have been refined and maintained in the ritual precisely for their devastating effect against that creature who is the main principle of evil in the world. The reading of these prayers in English, let alone Latin, is just breathtaking.

From a theological point of view the prayers of the 1614 Latin exorcism ritual are perfect: they are steeped in Scripture which is the "soul of theology" and generously apply biblical images that manifest the utter trampling that God has subjected the devil to in the history of salvation. Father Amorth observes that the Bible never tells us to fear the devil; rather, we are to resist him and to remain faithful and firm against him,[2] and these prayers certainly do that. In fact, they do more. They have a certain theological "counter-terrorism" perspective of a militant church that has spent long ages studying its enemy and has sent many a soldier in to battle to engage his wits and will with an infernal adversary. The prayers exude an air of impenetrable authority that humiliates and devastates the one against whom they are employed.

From a literary perspective the prayers are also magnificent. I am by no means a Latin expert, but it is obvious that the prayers' literary form is a well-crafted prose full of feeling and conviction. Their vocabulary is extensive and elegant. They do not repeat verbiage unnecessarily but rather repeat and augment images deliberately for effect against the demon in much the same way that a parent will emphasize repeatedly and pointedly certain basic rules of conduct to a disobedient child. The prayers radiate poise and practicality with a feeling of a total embrace of the subject without the need to use blunt or crass language to make their case. More than anything, they display a biblical and traditional faith which is clear, cogent and creative. There is never any excess of the expression in these prayers and commands.

One good example of the excellence of these prayers may suffice. I take as my model the first exorcism prayer in the 1614 ritual which I reproduce here in English. The Latin is even more glorious. After humbly begging that God will come to the assistance of the exorcist and the afflicted person, the priest launches into the demon with these magnificent words:

I cast you out, unclean spirit, along with every Satanic power of the enemy, every specter from hell, and all your fell companions; in the name of our Lord Jesus ✠ Christ. Be gone and stay far from this creature of God. ✠ For it is He who commands you, He who flung you headlong from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell. It is He who commands

[1] Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist: More Stories*, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2002, p. 51.
[2] Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist Tell His Story*, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1999, p. 135.

you, He who once stilled the sea and the wind and the storm. Hearken, therefore, and tremble in fear, Satan, you enemy of the faith, you foe of the human race, you begetter of death, you robber of life, you corrupter of justice, you root of all evil and vice; seducer of men, betrayer of the nations, instigator of envy, font of avarice, fomenter of discord, author of pain and sorrow. Why, then, do you stand and resist, knowing as you must that Christ the Lord brings your plans to nothing? Fear Him, who in Isaac was offered in sacrifice, in Joseph sold into bondage, slain as the paschal lamb, crucified as man, yet triumphed over the powers of hell. (The three signs of the cross which follow are traced on the brow of the possessed person.) Be gone, then, in the name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son, ✠ and of the Holy ✠ Spirit. Give place to the Holy Spirit by this sign of the holy ✠ cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.
All: Amen.

Put yourself in the place of the devil for a moment and imagine yourself subject to that dose of spiritual bleach in your face!

Note in this prayer the six signs of the cross traced over the person. Note the biblical images of Isaac, Joseph, the Paschal Lamb and the Crucified One used against the devil and the mention of Christ precipitating him into the depths of hell. Note the psychological warfare with the twelve taunting epithets designed to inspire terror in the belly of the evil one. Note the Trinitarian formula and the command to "give place" to the Holy Spirit. Note the rhetorical questions, "Why do you resist?" and "Why do you stand…?" intimidating the devil with the inevitability of Christ's victory. This is only the first of three imperative (commanding) prayers of the ritual, and it is exemplary of how impressive all the prayers are as a weapon against the devil.

Three exorcisms as one
Most importantly, the three exorcism prayers of the old ritual are calibrated to increase the intensity of the warfare against the demon throughout the course of an encounter. This, I found, was totally lost on the 1999 revisers of the ritual which I will elaborate on below. The entire course of the three exorcisms is envisioned as a single commanding prayer for the devil to leave the afflicted person and is inlaid with humble appeals to Almighty God's power to cast him out. The exorcist is acutely aware that his own power does not expel any demon. It is God's might operating through the Church that casts out evil from persons or from the world. This single three-fold prayer, then, is designed to create an overwhelming spiritual pressure and an unstoppable momentum against the satanic power entrenched in the human body, a holy *tour de force* so to speak, that cannot be overcome by any demonic power. It can only be resisted for awhile and that, only if God wills. The prayers are the battlefield for the personal encounter between a consecrated man and a fallen angel, all for the purpose of liberating the poor afflicted soul for Christ.

Each of the three prayers begins with the aggressive personal command of the priest, "Exorcizo te" (I exorcise you) or "Adiuro te" (I adjure you) thus placing the demon immediately in a defensive position—which is where we like him to be! Thereafter these

encounters remain personal and sharply confrontative throughout and never turn into a "dialogue" with the demon. They are commands, not conversations, and are addressed with military force against an implacable enemy. As a former Green Beret friend of mine once said, "The only time I sit down to talk to the enemy is when I accept his unconditional surrender." Such is an exorcism.

The *first* prayer (above) contains the opening salvos of spiritual conflict reminding the devil of Christ's victory in the history of salvation, applying the crucifix and the Sign of the Cross generously and engaging in both spiritual and psychological warfare with an intelligent malevolent being. The demon is thus put on notice that he will not long remain in this body, that Christ the Savior has arrived to free the unfortunate victim of his servitude and that the Church will persist until the demonic presence is eradicated. The die of spiritual engagement is cast with the first exorcism prayer.

The *second* and longest prayer of the ritual (442 words in the Latin text) considerably steps up the warfare against the demon by more commands, humiliating language and aggressive actions. There are 14 commands made to the demon in the Name of Jesus. Each begins with the phrase "Imperat tibi Christus" (Christ—or some other saint—commands you) and to these are added *23 individual signings* with the Sign of the Cross! The devil hates the Cross more than anything in heaven, earth or hell. It is the perfect sign of his defeat, and it is pressed relentlessly into the possessed flesh of the victim and therefore into the demon's consciousness. The prayer refers to multiple biblical demons and animals that are trodden upon by the Lord's mighty power. The fact that this prayer is the longest of the three commanding prayers is also significant: the exorcist is attempting to wear the demon down. All throughout this long prayer, the demon is being bombarded by the power of heaven.

The exorcist proceeds then to the *third* imperative prayer which brings him to a state of all-out warfare against the demon. While this prayer is somewhat shorter than the middle exorcism prayer, it is the most intense of them all and is ordered to the singular goal of the demon's expulsion. For that reason the prayer is replete with biblical images of Christ's victory and of the Church's victory over demons by His power. Certain Old Testament typographical images of Christ come first (Moses vs. Pharaoh and David vs. Saul) but New Testament images abound here: Peter vs. Simon Magus and Annas and Saphira, Paul vs. Pythonissa and Elyma, etc. There is reference to John the Baptist's victory over the wickedness of Herod as well.

This third imperative prayer steps up the tenor of battle. It contains twelve separate signings with the Sign of the Cross and a host of Latin commands all of which are geared to get the demon to stand off and return to his place of perdition. The exorcist's commanding language reflects the immense authority he wields and the brute force of his attack. There are three commands to "yield" (L: *cede*). There are three commands to "give honor" or "give place" (L: *Da honorem* or *Da locum*). There are three commands to "depart" (L: *Exi*) and three forceful commands to "begone!" (L: *Discede*). Finally, he is told that Christ "casts [him] out" (L: *Ille te ejicit*), that Christ "expels [him]" (L: *Ille te expellit*) and that Christ "repels" or "excludes [him]" (L: *Ille te excludit*).

This prayer culminates in a familiar technique formerly employed by the so-called "hell-fire and brimstone" preachers of a past age: the sobering reminder that the Lord is coming "to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire." In the case of human beings we have only to live in a state of grace and have faith in Christ to avoid that fire, but in the case of the demon present in the body of the person, it represents a final and horrible endgame for him. He has no more hope of holding out against his imminent and terrible Judge. He must return to his home in the pool of burning sulfur (cf. Rev 20:10).

The Exorcism of Pope St. Leo XIII and its changes in the new ritual
To the 1614 *Rite of Exorcism* was added the Prayer of Pope St. Leo XIII for an exorcism of places. For the sake of brevity I will note only that this prayer is another most impressive example of the vigor of the Church Militant which was written by the authority of Pope Leo after his famous vision of Christ speaking with the devil after a Mass. This prayer begins with the longer version of the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel and proceeds with an aggressive prosecution of the infernal powers of hell that may infest the living and work places of the faithful. It was added as Part III of the 1614 ritual (after the introductory notes and the three-fold exorcism of persons). There are times when a simple blessing for a place will not suffice, and places which are truly infested with demons need a pray of this type.

The wording of this prayer has been keep intact in the 1999 revision but two major changes need to be noted. First, all but *one* of the signings with the Sign of the Cross have been eliminated from the text (in the original there are sixteen signings!) Secondly, the prayer has been defoliated of its original verses, responses, psalms and prayers that preceded and ended it. These are but scattered all over the place in the new ritual. Finally, this exorcism prayer was unceremoniously dumped into the Appendix with the magnificent prayer to St. Michael—which used to head the exorcism of place—thrown in after it. In the new ritual Michael has been given *literally the last place*. The only other prayers after it are "private supplications."

Slicing and dicing the 1614 ritual
Based upon the above overview of the three-fold exorcism I would like to demonstrate just how much of a hatchet job this revision really is. I will explain in detail a few of the most unpalatable changes first then try to summarize the rest in a chart for easy review.

Part I of the old ritual: exorcist guidelines
In the old ritual Part I consisted of 21 paragraphs of instructions to the exorcist about how he should conduct an exorcism. These guidelines by no means substituted for actual on-the-job experience of exorcism but at least made an attempt to give the priest some understanding of the dynamics of spiritual warfare and of the prudence needed to conduct the battle. Regretfully, twelve of the 21 instructions were deleted. Some were replaced with other concerns, not all bad, and others were just left out altogether. I consider these particular omissions a most egregious loss to the ritual.

In the plus category, the new introduction adds a prudent modern concern about maintaining confidentiality after an exorcism and prohibits an exorcist from going to the media with direct information about an individual exorcism.[3] This perhaps was the result of the televised 1991 exorcism of a girl in Florida on the ABC News show *20/20*. I was told by the then-chancellor of the diocese in which the exorcism was performed that the girl's family sued the diocese over this incident. Church liability aside, the poor soul was done an injustice by the exposure of her vulnerable spiritual state on prime time TV.

What was left out of the exorcist guidelines though was truly deplorable: specifics about how the demon tries to trick the exorcist or derail him from helping the individual; the proper use of relics and other sacramentals in the exorcism; the prohibition of applying the Eucharist directly to the body in an exorcism (perhaps the revisers thought this was understood; it is not, however, immediately evident to new exorcists); instructions on the specific questions to ask the demon prior to expulsion such as its name, how it entered, and the day and hour that God has decreed for its departure (demon's know this only too well); the need to find the demon's weak spot and exploit it; the prudence of never exorcising a woman without other women present (how could they have possibly missed that one in this climate of legal liability?); and the need to get information about any occult artifices, materials or curses that might continue to bind the individual to the demon's power.

Do these matters not seem fundamental to this kind of spiritual warfare? That they were eliminated from the new ritual is truly scandalous. Clearly, no actual exorcist was consulted in the revision of this ritual, and as I said in the introduction, the devil could not be happier to have a neophyte exorcist lock spiritual horns with him—totally unprepared!

From three to one

The 1614 ritual's three-fold climactic sequence of exorcisms building in intensity toward the expulsion of the demon is utterly dismantled and collapsed into one single prayer. A true exorcist is horrified by this. It is tantamount to chopping the *Inferno* and *Paradiso* off both ends of Dante's Divine Comedy and leaving only the *Purgatorio*! To one who is accustomed to using the 1614 ritual, the prayer feels totally denuded and hacked down to a stump. Mind you, the prayer is still an exorcism (an authoritative command to the demon to leave) preceded by a supplication to God for help, but objectively speaking, it does not subject the devil to the intense cumulative pressure of the three interlocking exorcism prayers designed to expel him forcefully. The devil may rest early and easily with this one unless the exorcist is experienced.

While the ritual does contain other exorcism prayers, the sin of the revision is that the prayers are both poorly reworked from the old ritual and are relegated to the optional section (*Texti Varii*) as well as to the Appendix. Sadly, the longest and most forceful prayer of the old ritual just simply has been excised with no equivalent in the new ritual.

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[3] Some insights about the changes have been taken from The New Rite of Exorcism: The Influence of the Evil One by Father X – *Summer 2002*.

Happy warfare

I was reminded of the character of this new ritual one day when I participated in a picket of an Episcopal Church that was hosting a luncheon for Planned Parenthood. Instead of seeing this as a serious act of conscientious objection, the hospitality committee of the parish came out and offered us coffee and donuts! This is what I call "happy warfare" and offers a somewhat cynical but I think accurate view of what the devil must feel when an exorcist attacks him with this ritual. Coming against the devil with bland language and stunted prayers will in no way get the devil to take an exorcist seriously. In itself the ritual is little more than a peace offering to the devil timidly asking him, if it's not too much trouble, to please leave. Unless it is applied with virtue and intelligence, the devil can just break out the refreshments and ride out the storm waiting for the unpleasant protestor (the exorcist) to go away. This may be an exaggeration but in comparing the new ritual to the old one it is not much so.

Rather than an intelligent and aggressive blitzkrieg on the devil's territory, backed up by the Church Militant, the new ritual has the feel of a polite liturgical text that is reluctant to offend. It has the character of one of those lib-church self-loathing apologies for why Protestants can't receive Communion at Catholic weddings or some kind of embarrassed making of the Sign of the Cross before eating in a public restaurant. It is a limp and truncated liturgical battle hymn, not Sun Tzu's *Art of War* for eliminating the enemy of the human race.

Comparison of the new vs. the old

The following chart should suffice as a brief comparison of the two rituals. By its very nature such a chart leaves out much that can only be understood by looking directly at the original texts, but rather than an extended exegesis on the texts themselves, the chart may help the reader to understand the basics of my complaint about the revision. I have put what I consider to be the most egregious changes in italics for immediate comparison.

1614 Ritual	**1999 Ritual**
Exorcism #1 (see above) 151 words (in the Latin) 6 Signs of the Cross 13 negative appellations for the devil 7 commands 4 Old/New Testament references	[The comparable exorcism is relegated to "optional texts" in the new ritual] 193 words 4 Signs of the Cross 9 negative appellations for the devil 9 commands 4 Old/New Testament references
Exorcism #2 442 words 23 Signs of the Cross Signing of breast and forehead 14 "Imperat tibi" (direct commands) 3 "Adjuro te" (I adjure you) Mention of the Virgin Mary	Exorcism (single exorcism in main text) *162 words* *3 Signs of the Cross* *No signing of breast and forehead* *0 "Imperat tibi" references* *3 "Adjuro te" (I adjure you)* *No mention of the Virgin Mary*

Biblical images of demon-animals being trodden upon	*No mention of biblical demon-animals trodden upon*
Exorcism #3 389 words 12 Signs of the Cross 11 Old/New Testament images 14 commands (Give place-Depart-Be gone) Eject-Expel-Repel sequence Threat of hellfire	[This prayer is inexcusably relegated to "optional texts" and horribly rewritten] *142 words* *1 Sign of the Cross* *1 mild New Testament image* *8 commands* *No Eject-Expel-Repel sequence* *No threat of hellfire*
Exorcism Over Place (Pope Leo XIII) This is actually Part III of the Ritual.	Exorcism Over Place (Pope Leo XIII) *[This text is indefensibly dropped in the Appendix and chopped into multiple pieces losing its organic unity as a prayer.]*

What's an exorcist to do?

Dr. Daniel Van Slyke of Ave Maria College noted in a conference last year that the *Rite of Exorcism* was not revised—it was re-written.[4] Given the above observations, I believe his assessment is correct. While I believe that the new ritual still contains an element of spiritual warfare and personal confrontation between the exorcist and the demon, it does require a more diligent application of faith, prayer and sheer effort for the exorcist to compensate for what the ritual lacks. The priest simply cannot rely on the beauty and architecture of the Latin text to be a supernatural conduit strengthening his attack against the demon. He is handicapped by this ritual. The Church's centuries-old, highly refined exorcism texts have been torn apart in a way that must immensely please the devil because the exorcist's capacity to expel that spiritual invader is severely diminished.

Must an exorcist use the ritual? Thankfully, no. After the 1999 revised ritual was promulgated by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Medina Estevez, the Prefect, issued a decree that an exorcist may use the 1614 ritual with the permission of the authorizing bishop. It is believed that then-Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, weighed in on this matter to grant this permission. Many exorcists breathed a sigh of relief.

Sympathy with Traditional Mass devotees

Prior to my study of the exorcism ritual I certainly had sympathy for those who complained of the dramatic "revisions" of the Tridentine Mass, but now I would call my sympathy something rather like "solidarity." I fully understand the complaints: banalizing the language, trivializing the sacred character of the ritual, reducing the role of the priest to hardly more than an entertainment supervisor, emasculating the vitality of the liturgical

[4] *The Wanderer*, Jay McNally, "Exorcisms, Liturgical Abuse, And Faulty Translations Scored," December 1, 2005.

prayer and effects, etc. The exorcism ritual is only a sacramental of the Church (not a Sacrament), but yet its sacred power is deeply compromised by this so-called revision.

What are we to get from this analysis other than more reason for complaints? We are to allow this further abomination to drive us down to our knees and beg the good Lord to give us back His Church Militant. Only a fully battle-equipped Church will be capable of meeting the challenges of the aggressive pagan culture that imbues every aspect of social and political life nowadays. The prevailing pagan culture is not only demon-worshipping but it is resolute in its determination to destroy all vestiges of the social kingship of Jesus Christ and is rapidly executing hostile take-overs of our families. Militant faith, in the grand tradition of the exorcist-like priest saints (St. Francis Xavier, St. John Vianney, St. Edmund Campion etc.), will save the culture and the Church; nothing less.

Lest we lose hope for a restoration of the Church Militant, let us remember that we are that Church Militant and that Christ is still in charge of His Church. Our part is to live heroically our Baptismal promises to "reject Satan and all his works and all his empty promises" and then to throw ourselves headlong into the work of evangelizing culture with militant confidence that Christ, the High-Priest of exorcists, will save us from all the works of the devil and his minions.

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